

WALES AUDIT OFFICE INSPECTION OF NORTH WALES HOUSING ASSOCIATION

North Wales Housing Association welcomes the report of the Wales Audit Office following inspection. We are certain that the outcome of the inspection and the process itself is helping the organisation to further improve our services and make us better able to meet the expectations of our customers.

The Wales Audit Office considers that the Association is securing continuous improvement in services and is raising standards in service delivery.

The inspection, which was carried out in March 2006, also judged that we were providing a satisfactory service in all eight of the areas considered. We believe that at the time of inspection this was a reasonable reflection of our service delivery.

The inspectors highlighted several areas of good practice:

- In terms of our approach to **access to information**, the Association was praised for the way its information was easily accessible to the public. For example, all of our publications are available in a wide range of formats, our web site is available in large print and all staff and Board members have undertaken equality and diversity training.
- The housing management service we offer ensures that residents are offered the most secure form of occupancy and we were praised for our **evaluation of 'probationary' tenancies**. The Association piloted this approach in areas where there had been issues of anti-social behaviour and, since January 2006 all new tenants are offered 'starter' tenancies, which automatically convert to an assured shorthold tenancy after 12 months, unless there have been problems.
- The inspectors acknowledged that we had developed a robust and effective approach to **'Best Value'**, which features clear methodology and has resulted in significant improvements in service.

NWHA believes the inspection was carried out in a positive manner and found the experience to be constructive and helpful. For example, we were pleased that the Wales Audit Office chose to pilot a new approach to determining the final report with our organisation and that they found the outcome to be encouraging. It is only disappointing that there has been a long delay in publishing the final report, which we have found frustrating.

Our commitment to continuous improvement was not only apparent to the inspectors, but is something that we have built on. We have adopted an **action plan** to help us meet our objectives and we are now working towards agreeing the plan with the Lead Inspector.

A number of key actions have already been achieved since the inspection. The key features of our action plan are highlighted below, demonstrating our commitment to improving service delivery:

- **Repairs and maintenance** is the service most valued by residents and in developing our collaborative working approach as part of the Undod partnership we are aiming to provide value for money, effective budget control, accurate performance information and a good quality service. We will be comparing our performance against others and improving the way we prioritise repairs.

- We have implemented a **rents** improvement plan emphasising a more proactive approach to debt prevention and more effective use of control and recovery mechanisms. We have also restructured our service to create a new Incomes Team with the aim of ensuring a consistent focus on all areas of income collection and debt recovery.
- Improving policies and practices linked to **resident involvement, community development and customer services** is a priority. We are now including a '*You Said...We Did*' feature in our Clwb Seren magazine, the management of customer complaints has been improved, we are involving residents in the introduction of new customer service standards by Spring 2007 and we are looking to introduce more ways of enabling residents to be involved through e-communication.
- In terms of **equality and diversity**, we are committed to ensuring that we comply with the full range of requirements of the Commission for Racial Equality's Code of Practice. We are monitoring a wider range of information and reporting regularly to the Board. We will also meet the deadlines within our Welsh language scheme action plan.
- We are strengthening arrangements for **partnership working** and adopting a more proactive approach to securing increased involvement in renewal and regeneration initiatives. Our restructuring has resulted in the appointment of a new Business Development Director to develop new business opportunities, build and sustain partnerships and co-ordinate our investment and regeneration activities.
- To ensure an adequate balance in **letting** our housing we are developing a clear service improvement plan based on a comprehensive analysis of performance, which will include acting on the outcomes of a Best Value review of empty homes management.
- Our service related to **anti-social behaviour**, which has been commended by our partners North Wales Police, is being developed further through a range of partnership initiatives, better information, training and consideration of rewards and incentives through our Clwb Seren scheme.
- In providing housing for **people with support needs** we have begun to improve our monitoring and review arrangements to ensure that services provided match individual needs. We are also developing a better system of evaluating how services are provided to residents.
- We recognise the importance of **continuous improvement** in service delivery and have developed a comprehensive 'tracking' system to help us prioritise more effectively and plan with a clearer understanding of our capacity to deliver.

It is very important to the Association that we have been recognised as securing continuous improvement and raising standards in service delivery. This means we are heading in the right direction. We have entered into the inspection process enthusiastically and believe that it has given us an excellent platform from which we can make further progress. It will mean little, however, unless we are able to translate this experience into improved services for our customers. That is our priority. We remain committed to improving services and helping to build decent and inclusive communities.